

State attorney general warns of scams targeting seniors

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State law enforcement in recent months has seen an increase in mortgage foreclosure "rescue" schemes, lottery scams and other types of fraud targeted at senior citizens, state Attorney General Terry Goddard said Tuesday.

"We see more of these every day," he told an audience of about 35 people at Lake Havasu High School. "In times of economic distress, people want to believe that it's true. They want to believe they've won a lottery that they haven't even entered."

Goddard touched on these and other crime-related issues at a forum meant to increase awareness of criminal trends and prevention strategies.

Goddard said most of these scams originate in Canada. His office has been monitoring these schemes by collecting junk mail from across the state. Several trends have emerged through charting these types of scams, Goddard said.

The lottery scammers usually pay the victim \$2,000 to \$3,000 before "bleeding them to death," he said. Victims are told they need to pay \$5,000 or \$10,000 in legal fees before they can get their check. One resident lost \$75,000 this way, Goddard said.

"These scams are very believable. Unfortunately, many people hear the pitch and believe it," he said.

The key, Goddard said, is asking the tough questions. He said his office has also seen an increase in identity theft, a crime he said is oftentimes linked to methamphetamine.

"Meth labs and consumer fraud are joined at the hip," Goddard said. "I don't know why."

He said the two are so closely connected that a forensic accountant is sent along on most drug raids involving meth labs.

Yet he pointed out that those types of busts are down compared to past years, a result of tougher restrictions on pseudoephedrine, a key ingredient in manufacturing meth. The other reason, he said, is that more meth is being smuggled from Mexico.

"It's much better than it was, but I'm not going to say it's eliminated," Goddard said of the state's meth problem.